

ADDRESS

OF THE

MANAGERS

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OF THE

PHILADELPHIA BIBLE SOCIETY,

TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF THE

STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

PHILADELPHIA:

Printed by Clark & Raser, 33 Carter's Alley.

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ADDRESS.

*The Managers of the Philadelphia Bible Society, to the
Inhabitants of the State of Pennsylvania.*

Fellow Citizens and Fellow Christians—

PERMIT us, in soliciting your attention to the subsequent Address, to advert for a moment to the origin, the design, and the operations, of the PHILADELPHIA BIBLE SOCIETY. It originated from contemplating and appreciating the benefits resulting from the institution of the British and Foreign Bible Society. It was organized in the year 1809, and was the first, and for some time the only association of the kind, in the United States. It received, a few years after its establishment, a publick act of incorporation, from the Legislature of Pennsylvania, to which a report of its proceedings, required by its charter, has regularly been made. Its simple and sole design is, to distribute, as extensively as its means will permit, the sacred Scriptures, without note or comment. Its operations have been constantly and scrupulously directed to their prescribed end; and their salutary effects have been felt and acknowledged in most of the States of the American Union, and in a measure also, in foreign and distant lands.

But while we are conscious that, as Managers of this Society, we have acted with fidelity, and not without a portion of zeal; and while we would be thankful for the aid and countenance we have received from the Christian publick, and for the good which may have been effected through our feeble instrumentality; it is certain that we have often and painfully felt, that we were doing far less than we could have wished. We are not even prepared to say—we dare not say—that we have done all that we might; all that a more just and impres-

sive view of our duty would have urged us to undertake; and that pious Christians and patriotick citizens, if suitably called on, would readily have furnished us with the means to accomplish. Instructed and animated by some recent occurrences, we have firmly resolved, in reliance on divine aid, and looking for the blessing of God to rest on our humble endeavours, to aim at effecting more than we have heretofore attempted; to enter on a more arduous work, and we hope on a more fertile field of usefulness, than any in which we have hitherto laboured. The enterprise in contemplation will best be made known by reciting a resolution, unanimously adopted by our Board, at a meeting on the 17th instant, and expressed in the following words—"Resolved, that an immediate effort be made to supply every destitute family in the State of Pennsylvania with a copy of the sacred Scriptures, within the term of three years, and sooner if it shall be found practicable."

It is in reference to the effort, to which we are pledged by this resolution, that we now address you.

Allow us, first of all, earnestly to solicit your special attention to THE NECESSITY which exists for such an effort as we have resolved to make. The necessity for this measure has been forcibly impressed on our own minds, by discoveries which have lately been made. We are well informed, that, on actual inquiry and examination, it has been fully ascertained, that in districts and villages which it had been supposed were completely replenished with copies of the Holy Scriptures, many families have been found utterly destitute of a Bible. What then, we have said, must be the state of places and regions of an entirely different character, many of which exist in Pennsylvania—to which no adequate supply of the sacred volume has ever been sent, and in which some who would willingly purchase it, cannot find it for sale. Those who possess and prize the oracles of God, and whose chief intercourse is with those whose minds and habits are like their own, do not know or suspect, till undeniable facts apprise them of the melancholy truth, how numerous are the dwellings, in every part of our country, into which no copy,

nor any part of a copy, of the sacred writings, has ever entered. In the large and populous State which we inhabit, considerable sections of which have been newly settled, it cannot reasonably be doubted, that there are many thousand families who possess not a single page of the book of God's revealed will. Fellow Christians and fellow citizens, however calculated to fill us all with grief and alarm, let us not resist the evidence of this unquestionable fact. And does it admit of a question, whether these destitute families, in which are many children and youth, as well as persons of riper age, *need* to be supplied, with at least one Bible to each family? No assuredly—but a most serious question it is, whether the friends and possessors of the Bible—whether we ourselves—have performed our whole duty in this interesting concern. Are our consciences clear while this destitution is known to us, and yet adequate measures to remove it, if at all within our power, are not adopted?

Let it not be said that the whole fault rests with the destitute themselves; that their want of Bibles is voluntary; that they might have obtained them, if they had chosen to do so. These allegations, in all their extent, cannot be sustained. There are some parts of our State, as already remarked, where copies of the Scriptures are not easily found; and where they may be found, there are many individuals and families who cannot purchase them, without a sacrifice of the necessities of life.

But suppose we admit that inexcusable criminality attaches to every family, and every individual, that is found without a Bible; and to many there is no question that such criminality does actually attach. Still, the possessors of the Bible are to recollect, that they have not themselves been taught as yet, one of the most important doctrines of the Bible, if they have not learned, in imitation of the Father of mercies, to “do good to the unthankful and the evil.” Alas! if He who gave us the Bible had treated any of us according to our deserts, how fearful had been our destiny! If the Saviour and his apostles had gone only to those who were prepared to

welcome them, Christianity had expired in its cradle. If missionaries and martyrs had not carried the Bible to our heathen ancestors, we at this hour might have been bowing down to stocks and stones. Freely and undeservingly have we received, and as we have received so we are commanded to give. It is the greatest calamity of those who wilfully neglect the Bible, that they are insensible of its value and of their own guilt—They need the Bible to teach them both; to teach them their error, and “to guide their feet into the way of peace.”

If we carry the sacred treasure to their doors, and tender it to them kindly, we have no reason to doubt that it will generally meet with a ready and thankful reception. A few exceptions there may be—a few who may indignantly refuse either to purchase a Bible, or to receive it as a gift. Yet even in cases of this description, it may be hoped, (for so it has sometimes happened) that the very enormity of his impiety may speedily shock the impious refuser, and lead him ultimately to deep and effectual repentance—In any event, by pursuing the course here delineated, we shall relieve ourselves from all suspicion that a part of our own duty has been neglected.

THE IMPORTANCE of the measure in question is partly involved in its *necessity*, which has just been shown. There are however other considerations, demonstrating its importance, that ought to be taken into view—Considerations at which we can but rapidly glance, although volumes might be employed in their illustration and enforcement.

That an intimate acquaintance with the records of inspiration, and a regard to their sacred truths, will ever exert the happiest and most powerful influence—an influence more efficient than can be derived from every other source—in promoting civilization, good morals, domestick happiness, social order, an enlightened and ardent attachment to civil liberty, and to all the institutions of free governments, has been the avowed opinion of men as highly gifted with sagacity, and distinguished by all intellectual powers and attainments,

as the world has ever seen. From a host that might be named, let it suffice to mention Grotius, Milton, Locke, Johnson, and Sir William Jones; and it may be safely affirmed, that experience has decisively ratified what sages have taught. It is manifest therefore that patriotism, as well as piety, is concerned to put a Bible into every family of our free republick. He who is unwilling to aid in this good work, fails in an important duty which he owes to his country. We verily believe, that when the measure we propose shall be fully executed, its effects will soon be visible, in the diminished number of the inmates of our prisons and poor-houses, and the frequenters of tippling shops and brothels.

A general and familiar acquaintance with the Bible, will also be calculated to promote, directly or indirectly, every pious and benevolent institution, which contributes to characterize and to do honour to the age in which we live. All these institutions may fairly be considered as deriving their existence from the Bible. But for this holy book, they never would have had a being. This is the fountain, which has sent forth all these streams of benevolence and piety, to refresh, and restore, and fertilize the moral wastes and desolations, with which human depravity and guilt have covered the earth. The more deeply any individual drinks at this fountain, the more will he be invigorated and animated to promote human happiness, in his favourite mode of operation —Some in Bible societies, others in Tract societies, others in Missionary societies, others in Lord's day or Sunday schools. others in Bible classes, others in ameliorating the condition of the poor and the prisoner, and not a few in patronizing, without distinction, every one of these thrice blessed institutions. Let then the friends and patrons of them all be assured, that in aiding to carry into effect the measure we propose, they are most effectually helping themselves—helping forward the charity which they think most important, and to which they have chiefly devoted their means and their exertions. Of every charity whatever, the funds, we are persuaded, will be

largely increased, and the co-operators multiplied, when a Bible shall be owned and read in every family.

The importance of the measure contemplated, is also great, even in reference to the duty of sending the Bible into Pagan lands, and to other destitute countries and places. The system hitherto pursued has been, to endeavour to supply domestick and foreign demands, at the same time. In this system we have co-operated; and far be it from us to condemn it—We wish rather to continue and extend it. But we are now persuaded, that some of the best means for its extension have not yet been used. Suppose a Bible placed in every family in our country, and then think on the natural operation of this event, in rendering it practicable for Bible societies to send large supplies to foreign countries, and to the heathen. Consider, in the first place, the exertions which must be made to supply all the families of our own country—the meetings that must be called, the speeches which will be made, the printed discussions that will be sent abroad, the explorers and agents that will be employed, the representations they will make wherever they go, and the conversations which will be held among all descriptions of people, and in every family, on the subject of the Book of God—All these causes and excitements will combine their influence, to rouse such an attention to the Bible cause, and to enlist such an active zeal into its service, as we have never yet witnessed; and resources will be furnished, adequate not only to the supply of the domestick demand—the first and favourite object—but to increase fourfold, perhaps tenfold, the means of sending relief to the destitute, wherever they may be found.

Consider, in the next place, that when every family at home is once supplied, it will require comparatively but a small number of copies of the Scriptures, to keep up the supply: and thus will be left, unobstructed, nearly the whole of our augmented resources, to pour the waters of life, in copious streams, over the lands which are now withering under the desolations of heathenism, or the blastings of superstition and tyranny. We firmly believe that the effect of the proposed

measure will be, to enable and dispose the Bible societies of this country to send copies of the sacred Scriptures, as rapidly as they may be demanded, to those millions of our brethren, in the southern part of our continent, who have never as yet seen a Bible.

The importance, moreover, of the proposed measure, when carried into effect, may be, and we hope will be, incalculably great, from its influence *as an example*. We have no wish to conceal or disguise the fact, that to the adoption of this measure we have ourselves been excited, by the example set us in a neighbouring State. We deem it honour enough, although ours is the oldest Bible institution in the United States, that we have not been slow in *following* a good example. It is not the spirit of that Bible which we distribute, to refuse to do good, unless the plan for doing it has originated with ourselves. To our fellow Christians we will not attribute selfish motives and narrow views, to which we have shown ourselves superior. They will imitate the example of Pennsylvania, as we have imitated that of New Jersey. Our State is one of the largest and most populous in the national union. When it shall be seen, as we confidently trust it will be seen, that it was practicable to put a Bible into every family throughout our extended territory, it can no longer be pretended that the same thing cannot be done in any other State. It can, and we believe it will, be done. Our brethren in other States will not choose to be out-done in so noble an enterprise. Nay, we even presume to hope, that protestant Christendom will profit by this example. The idea of supplying every family with a Bible seems so simple, when once suggested, that we wonder it did not sooner occur. In this respect it resembles exactly, the first idea of that British and Foreign Bible Society, whose example, for more than twenty years past, has been filling the world with associations, formed on its own model. If the Western world shall reflect back some rays of light, in return for those which it received from the East, let us not believe that the inhabitants of the East will shut their eyes against them. Let us rather hope, that while looking

abroad with the spirit of true Christian philanthropy, they will also, influenced by our example, look more attentively at home, and feel the obligation to introduce a Bible into every family, within the states and kingdoms to which they severally belong—If this shall be realized, who can calculate the blessings and benefits which will be the certain result!

We have already intimated that the measure we advocate is PRACTICABLE—A belief in its practicability indeed, must, it is obvious, have been the ground of our whole proceeding. Now, that those who may be ready to differ from us in opinion, may not impute our confidence to an imperfect and hasty estimate of the magnitude and difficulty of our undertaking; as well as that our friends and fellow citizens may be fully apprized of the extent to which we shall need their aid; we shall make a brief statement of what we are aware must be effected, in order to render successful the measure in contemplation.

By the Census of 1820, it appears that the population of our State, on the 20th of August, of that year, was one million, forty-nine thousand, four hundred and fifty-eight. Add a fourth of this number, as the probable increase, in somewhat more than seven years, and our present population will be, thirteen hundred and thirteen thousand, eight hundred and thirty-two. Say that, on an average, five individuals compose a family; and the number of families in the State will be two hundred and sixty-two thousand, seven hundred and sixty-six. Admit that one-fourth of these families—and we fear the number will prove to be greater rather than less—will be found without a Bible; and the result will be, that there are (disregarding fractions throughout) sixty-five thousand, six hundred and ninety families, in the State of Pennsylvania, to be supplied with copies of the sacred Scriptures. But while these copies are in distribution, an additional number, to a considerable amount, will be needed for our ordinary purposes; so that one hundred thousand copies of the Scriptures at least, must be at the disposal of the Society, in the course of three years—Of these too, a considerable proportion must be

in the German language, of which nearly the whole must be imported from Europe. No inconsiderable number of explorers, agents, or distributors, must be employed in all parts of the State, whose business will be one of detail and difficulty. The funds indispensable for furnishing the necessary copies of the Scriptures, and for the unavoidable expenses of agents, and for many incidental charges, cannot be scanty. Much time, labour, and activity, also, will be necessary on our part, and on the part of the committees which we must appoint, to superintend and direct the operations on which the success of the measure will essentially depend.

Such is the view which we have deliberately taken of the enterprise before us; and still we have not a doubt that it is practicable, and but little fear that it will not prove successful. —Permit us, in closing our Address, to state the grounds on which our hopes and expectations rest; and while we do so, to make some explanations, and offer some considerations, which we deem important.

The copies of the Scriptures which will be needed in the English language, can, we believe, be furnished from our own stereotype presses, and from some cheap purchases which can be made in this city. We doubt not the readiness of the American Bible Society, to afford us assistance, if their resources would permit. But that society must be drawn on largely for copies of the Scriptures, by the States of New York and New Jersey, and probably by several others. On much aid from this quarter, therefore, we ought not to reckon; and it is gratifying to find ourselves so circumstanced, that we need not add to the burdens which the National Institution is called to sustain, and which it is probable will be constantly increasing. Our stereotype printers inform us, that with but a small additional expense, they can deliver four thousand copies of the English Bible per month; which is probably as many as will be required. Fortunately, we some time since ordered from Europe a considerable number of German Bibles, the arrival of which may daily be expected. We propose, without delay, to order a large additional importation, which we may rea-

sonably hope will be in hand, nearly as soon as they will be wanted. The copies we shall need, in the French and Spanish languages, we can obtain without difficulty. The visiting of all the families throughout the whole State, however arduous, has, we know, actually been effected, and that repeatedly, for the purpose of making a Census; and inquiries, far more numerous and minute than any which we shall need to propose, have been made and answered—With us the undertaking will be far less troublesome, and more expeditious, than it was found by the civil officers. The extent, however, of the explorations which must be made, and the number of copies of the Bible, in different languages, which must be obtained, are the causes why we have allowed ourselves so long a period as three years, for the accomplishment of our work. In that space, we doubt not it may be achieved—we hope in a shorter period.

In many counties of the State, Bible Societies and Associations have long been established. From these, we look for ready and vigorous assistance. If some of them have relaxed their efforts, or even approached the point of extinction, we trust they will now waken into new life, put forth all their energies, and prove powerful auxiliaries, in the great and good cause which is common to them and us. We must, however, in passing, respectfully ask, that in taking their measures, they will act in concert with our agents, and not adopt plans inconsistent with the instructions which these agents will receive; inasmuch as a uniform system of operation will greatly tend to prevent interference, collision and discontent, and to ensure ultimate success. In places where Bible Societies do not exist, and perhaps in some where they do, it will be the business of our agents to form, or assist in forming, new Associations, which will exert an active agency in carrying into effect the directions of our Board, within their proper spheres. With Bible Societies, Associations and agents, it must rest, to decide when and in what places, publick meetings of the friends of the Bible may be held, at which speeches in favour of the proposed measure may be made, collections be taken up, and plans for collecting funds and for visiting families be formed.

That the editors of religious periodicals, which are now numerous and popular, will appear decisively in favour of our undertaking, and use their whole influence to promote our views, is confidently expected; and we greatly miscalculate, if most of the multitudinous gazettes and newspapers of the day, whose editors are generally friendly to good morals, liberal views, and benevolent schemes; whose paragraphs are widely diffused and not a little influential, will not be found coming forth in favour of a plan, whose scope is to multiply exceedingly the copies of the best of books, and to distribute them among the poor and the necessitous.

On the clergy of all denominations, in every part of the State, we rely for a prompt and active co-operation. In such manner as they shall judge most expedient, we respectfully and earnestly request them, to make known the contents of this Address to the people of their charge; to favour the efforts of our agents; to animate their people to new exertions for extending the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures; and in every proper way to promote a work, which seems to us to be immediately connected with the duties of their vocation.

From the pious youth of our State, especially from those who are looking forward to the ministry of the Gospel, we expect considerable aid, in visiting families and distributing Bibles. While this is stated, however, it may be proper also to mention, that as the Bibles we dispense are all without note or comment, so it is, and will be, the express injunction of this Board, that those who deliver them use no endeavours, more or less, to inculcate, or even suggest, any sectarian opinions. It is not to promote a sect, but to deliver a Bible, and to recommend its careful perusal, that every family is to be visited.

As to funds, which must be considerable, and a large part of which must be promptly supplied, we have no other reliance than the Christian, philanthropick, and patriotick liberality and zeal, of our fellow citizens—On this liberality and zeal we have calculated, because we have already often witnessed their exercise, and because we believe that an object

was never presented to them, more adapted to draw them forth, in all their ardour and productiveness, than the object which we now present. Already have we expressed the favourable opinion and kind sentiments which we cherish, toward the various charities and benevolent designs which exist among us; in many of which we have taken our part, and for their promotion are now using our best endeavours. But none of them do we esteem comparable, in point of importance, to the distribution of the Bible; and we hope we may say it without offence, that contributions to none of them, ought even to *diminish* what should be given to send a Bible into every family in our State. Then, as we have already shown, there will be a powerful reaction, in favour of all other charities. But till then, let this have the preference: ~~For~~ ~~liberal~~ donations, we repeat, are essential to success. Unless the rich will come forward with contributions, far, very far, greater in amount than they have ever given to this object—and the poor with their mites, and all classes of the community with such liberal offerings as a peculiarly great and interesting object demands, we know that we cannot succeed. But we address a people who have ever proved themselves beneficent; and we believe that in all we have said, we have only been responding to the sentiments of thousands and ten thousands of pious and benevolent hearts, throughout the State in which we live. If we had not believed this—believed that our fellow citizens and fellow Christians were prepared to go along with us, and that some of them were waiting and wishing for us to take the lead, we should not have dared to embark in this enterprise. But we do believe, that an overwhelming majority of the population of this State are prepared for this measure; and if they are, they have only to will its success, and success will follow as surely as the effect follows the cause. We view ourselves, in fact, only as representatives and factors of the friends of the Bible. They have put us in trust, and the State in which we live has favoured us with a competent charter. To our constituents, and to our State, we feel that we owe important ser-

vices; and we solemnly believe that the best service we can render is, to see that effectual provision be made, that every inhabitant of the State may read or hear the revealed will of God. This, with the help of God, and the aid of our fellow citizens, we are determined shall be effected—at least to such an extent, that the fault of any deficiency shall not be ours. We earnestly and affectionately solicit the prayers of our brethren, that the smiles and benediction of Heaven may rest on our labours; may crown this arduous undertaking with signal success; and may attend every Bible that is distributed with a saving blessing, to the whole family into which it shall be introduced: and with the assurance that our humble supplications shall be united with theirs, we close our Address.

Signed in behalf of the Managers of the Philadelphia Bible Society, by

WILLIAM WHITE, *President.*

PHILIP F. MAYER, }
SILAS E. WEIR, } *Secretaries.*

Philadelphia, Sept. 22d, 1827.

